

✿ the queerty interview

Queer pop star Morgxn on newfound fame, music and love: “I’m deeply searching for real connection”



“I feel like a kid on Christmas morning. Which is ironic, since I’m Jewish.”

Morgxn doesn’t try to hide his excitement. The rising musical star has come to Los Angeles on his latest tour to play the fabled Troubador rock venue. Historically, the club serves as a major stepping stone for musicians, having elevated the careers of then-unknown acts like [Elton John](#), Radiohead, Guns N’ Roses, Weezer and [Linda Ronstadt](#) to international stardom.

Nashville native Morgxn has already enjoyed the taste of success. Last year, his single “home feat. WALK THE MOON” charted at #10 on the US Alternative charts. This year, he performed on [Jimmy Kimmel Live!](#) to a warm reception and released the single “A New Way” to help promote [GLAAD](#).

Dressed in a black sweatshirt, skinny slacks, blue-tinted eyeglasses and wearing opal nail polish, he takes a seat next to us at the Troubadour bar, his nerves aflutter before his Los Angeles show to chat about the state of his life. His tour will continue in Phoenix September 17 and in San Diego September 18.

So you’re about to do your first show at the Troubador.

To say I’m excited would be putting it lightly. I feel it’s a deep honor, and a deep sense of history.

How are you feeling about your life at the moment?

You know, when we announced the tour...I don’t book these shows. When they told me “In LA, you’re playing the Troubador.” I was actually at home in Nashville with my Mom. We had actually planned to go see [\[Rocketman\]](#). So my life has been synchronistic to say the least. It’s been following the dots, and not knowing how they will connect, but they connect in these weird synchronistic moments. For me, seeing that movie the day the tour was announced and finding out I’d be playing the Troubador, I mean, how am I feeling? I’m feeling like I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be.

What's the reception to the tour been like?

Well I think what surprises me the most is that since this is all new for me—*Vital* being my first album, the first body of work I've put out—obviously, I know "Home" has had market success on charts. But that's not really what got me into music. For me, I just wanted to express something, and I didn't know how. I think on this tour in particular, what has surprised me is I'm playing songs I've never played live, because when you open for people, you only have half an hour to go in and be like *how loud can I be? How much attention can I grab?* With this headline tour, it's been more about creating an arc and a flow, so I'm able to sit at the piano and play a song, which I haven't done because everything is so fast. The first night of tour, I played this song called "Blue" that people were singing the words so loudly that my hands stopped playing. I couldn't find the notes. I was so blown away that they were singing this song that to me is a deep cut. But I also like the deep cuts. They're where I exist.

So it's a realization that the words and the melodies that have been swimming around in my heart for the last few years have found their way into the open and are starting to connect with people. That's beautiful.

Yes it is. So what's your routine like before you go on stage?

I was just listening to a [David Lynch](#) audiobook, *Catching the Big Fish*. I do meditate. I feel like that's a fools admission because I'm also a mess in my head. I have a song, "Out of My Mind" which is written "OMM" because I do meditate, but I'm also out of my mind. Part of my routine of getting ready for anything is to warm up. I do shut out all noise and all distraction and conversation and I try to just remember why I do what I do. I think it can be really hard, especially in this modern age. I actually turned off all notifications on my phone, not because I'm a martyr of being present, but I want to give myself a chance to connect to something deeper.

That's awesome.

I have a deep sense of history thinking about all the people who have been on this stage, and the whole last year I've had with "Home" and radio and getting to speak to tons of stations. In a way, that's made this not just feel like *oh, cool song*. It's like *this is a song from my heart touching people*. Radio made that happen.



You know, when I was in college, the idea that you would mention an LGBTQ artist on the radio, or that an artist was queer was really far removed. We had [Melissa Etheridge](#). [George Michael](#), Elton, but they were all older and more established. Now queer artists on the radio we take for granted. Do you find that label in the context of playing your music to be a double-edged sword? It's cool that you're being visible, but you might find resistance to that in the music business who think it makes you unmarketable.

That's an interesting question. The thing I will say is that I spent a lifetime playing other parts and feeling like I would never be able to see the light of day by being myself. Whether that's what theatre ingrained in me, or being from the south. I just posted a story, a father wrote this son a note. He'd overheard him talking to his boyfriend saying he would come out to his family. His father wrote this beautiful note saying "The only thing you need to plan to do is bring home orange juice from the store, because we're out."

[Laughter]

I think it's a beautiful thing how visibility has grown. There are parts of the country and parts of the world that still need to see visibility. There's still so much work to do. I actually have someone on my team who is queer who being a part of creating the message and helping to get things out there. I don't see that a lot. I see a lot of queer art with a straight, white man as a gatekeeper for all that's going out. I think that's definitely a place that needs work. I would also say that being an artist who is enjoying the time in life where being queer and visible is not something like George Michael who suffered because he couldn't let out that really important part of who he was.

Right.

I've always felt like an outsider in every way. Growing up in Nashville, I was different and made fun of for a lot of those things because just on the surface I was a chubby kid. I had a higher voice. I loved to sing. So I was already a target. But even in the outsider community that is the queer community, I still feel like an outsider. There's an insider's space within what media has called the queer thing, that I don't feel a part of. I think there's still so many fringe and different expressions of queerness that I'm still not seeing. So the question makes me think how wonderful the visibility is, but within the visibility there's still a hierarchy that I think is fun to expose. What version of queer is actually what mainstream is accepting as queer? There are so many different colors.

Great point. As accepted as we've become, obviously, being queer isn't monolithic. We look, sound and have different needs from one another in some respects.

Oh, a 100%.

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But it's interesting that they're starting to understand that point, that we're not just skinny, femme white guys. Queer people look like everything and everybody.

You said it. You pinned the tail on the queer conundrum. With all the visibility that mainstream has seen, I want to ask how we can deepen our understanding and awareness of the queer world without needing to have a poster child. To me—and I've thought about this a lot—the X in my name, and the reason I'm so attracted to the X is sort of because I don't think labels are set up to help the person expressing themselves. I think it's more about how society can feel comfortable having all these new terms to categorize people. For me, I feel like I grew up with so many forms of labels and structures that I was told would help me come to terms with who I am.

How so?

For instance, I came out as gay. I had my first experience with a man when I was 17 and it took a few years to shake off that southern guilt. But when I came out as gay, I now look back and wish that I didn't feel a need to throw a label on myself. Really me coming out as gay was me trying to explain myself and make other people feel comfortable with what I was going through. That label is really limiting as to how I identify now.

How do you identify now?

Human. I like the word queer.

Yeah, it's more of an umbrella term.

It's also a term that I realize can be triggering to a lot of people, because it's also an insult I've been called. For me, reclaiming "queer" is part of my healing. It's fun to heal yourself and own these phrases that were insulting.



Sure.

I don't even joke when I say I identify as human. Throwing any label on myself at this day, for me, would be limiting because it's going to change. I am inevitably going to shift and evolve. I feel like the cop-out answer would be to say I'm queer and call it a day. The truth is my identity is constantly in motion. That's what I'm trying to embrace every day.

So I want to talk a little bit about your music...

What?

Well obviously. That's what you do. That's how you express yourself.

I appreciate that.

Observation of fact...

You'd be surprised how many people *don't* want to talk about music.

That's a shame. So when do you feel most inspired? How does a song begin to form in your mind?

Well, if I was lying, I would tell you I have the answer. If I told you the truth, every song has its own journey. To put parameters on creativity is not how I go about doing it. To me, creation, songwriting, and making art is so much about the discovery process. Sometimes that starts with a word. Sometimes it starts with a melody. Sometimes it starts with a drum groove. For example, "Out of My Mind;" I had just come off tour and into the studio and the producer already had a drum groove going. It just felt right, it had this energy, but I didn't know where it was going. So I was just like "loop that and let me get on the mic." Rather than write it down and try to make sense, I just wanted to see what comes out naturally. He hit record, and I kept singing until I got to

[He breaks full-on into song]

“Out of my mind! Out of my mind!” And I was like *that’s it*. Cut that, put it aside, then let’s go back and hit record and see what is on my mind. Which is something that, growing up in Nashville, I had a lot of people giving advice on the “right” way to write songs. I was told to write what I know, which I hate. I write what I don’t know in order to better understand. Everything is an exploration. So “Out of My Mind” was sort of an admission in the moment of what was on my mind. “Holy Water” actually started with, I had the crystal black rock tourmaline. And the word “tourmaline” is an interesting word. Even saying it right now I hear the melody. And I was just like *I would love to write a song with the word tourmaline*. That word inspired the weird query that led to “Holy Water.”



Very cool. I listened to a lot of your songs, and found some recurrent themes in your lyrics: loneliness, yearning, anxiety, reflections on the past, and what could have been. These themes of isolation. Where does that come from?

Oh. Well. You're looking at him.

Ok.

It comes from living in this world yearning for connection, and some days, totally striking out and not understanding how to connect. Especially in the structured forms of connection that we have like the internet and social media, I often find that I don't know how to connect. I'm deeply searching for real connection.

Do you think of yourself as a lonely person?

[Long pause]

I think of myself as a person who often feels lonely for sure. You know, there was a point in my life where I really tried to avoid sadness and loneliness. I think it was living in New York and being constantly surrounded by stimulus. I found myself really alone. Then moving to LA, and as quiet and sprawling as the city is, it's also...your thoughts become really loud. They can overwhelm you with all the space and isolation the city has. I think I hit a wall where I was like *I'm either going to continue running from myself, or I'm going to breathe and accept the three-dimensional qualities of myself.* I feel sad. I feel lonely. I feel joy. I feel excitement. They all co-exist in this person. So do I feel like a lonely person? No. Do I feel like a person who experiences loneliness? For sure.

That only speaks to your humanity. If you didn't feel lonely from time to time, I'd worry.

Especially in this city.

Great answer. Jumping off that, you've recently gone through a life transition in losing your dad. When you go through a period like that that is naturally difficult, how does that affect your work? How does it affect your writing?

I am not a perfect person by any means. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life. But one thing I think I did right was that when my dad passed, I took all the time to feel the depth of grief and sadness and pain and anger that come with it. I didn't rush it. If I could say I did one thing right, it's that I allowed myself the messy journey that was and continues to be the grief process. I was actually working on music before he passed, thinking I was going to release an EP called *Vital* which included the songs "Vital," "Bruised," "Kiss-Kiss" and "Love You with the Lights On." When he passed, I scrapped that idea. I sort of let that idea go. Everything followed, not just thinking of my life in song. A song like "Roots" was weeks after he passed. I almost cringe at how angry and brattish I sound in it. "Me Without You" was a year later, and I think sort of maturely sums up feelings of loss an inability to express how much someone means to you. I let myself have that process.

That's healthy.

Songs like “Home” existed in different forms, but it wasn’t until he passed that I took the sort of choir I recorded on it and changed the bassline of the song. That became the backbone of the song. Your question, how does it change you...it changes you completely if you let it. I had to let it happen, but it led me into a chapter of my life that became the chapter I ended up calling *Vital*. After letting it go, it came around again and became the more complete idea of *Vital*. It wasn’t just about the surface joys of yearning and desire. It also became about loss and identity and searching and losing something and finding it again.



So where do you go from here? Would you ever consider writing for the stage? I know you were an actor before you were a pop star.

I'm actually developing...am I going to say this?

Please.

I'm developing a project with the Nashville ballet.

Oh wow. What can you tell us about it?

Nothing.

Yay men in tights. You'll have to keep me posted on that one.

It will not be tights. It will be electronic and very visual and visceral. So, there's that. Where do I go from here? I'm going to continue showing up. I'm going to continue the adventure of discovery. Everything that has happened until now has been a discovery.

Ok, last question, and I don't want you to kiss & tell. But how does being on the road, a recording artist affect your dating life?

Conventional wisdom is pop idols get laid *all* the time.

I mean, nothing without consent.

[Laughter]

I'm not one to kiss and tell, but the only thing that has changed about my dating life is that it's a more global approach.

Morgxn's tour continues, next with a [show Sept. 17 in Phoenix and Sept. 18 in San Diego.](#)